Making violence visible: an exploration of linked homelessness and police data

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Context for the research

The relationship between homelessness and the police

Much research linking homelessness and the police is focused on shelter type services or rough sleepers.

- Prior research has found strong links between this type of homelessness and incarceration (Metraux and Culhane 2006; Dyb 2009)

- Those experiencing homelessness suffer from far higher rates of victimization than people who are housed (Diette and Ribar 2018; Lee and Schreck 2005; Wenzel et al. 2000).

- Factors that often intersect with homelessness, such as mental health issues and substance and alcohol use are also found to increase the risk of criminal victimisation (Hart et al. 2012).

- The role of the police in the lives of homeless people has been well explored in the context of revanchism – the punitive practices of controlling public space to exclude so called 'undesirable' people and practices (Smith 1996). Although the extent to which revanchism is occurring, particularly outside of the USA is contested (DeVertuil et al.2009; May and Cloke 2014).

- Domestic violence can be a cause of women and children's homelessness (Netto et al. 2009; Murray 2011). At times, the police can be key actors in this process.

Administrative data

- "Because people who experience homelessness are often users of multiple systems and are often homeless in part because of ineffective programmes and insufficient aftercare, these data may be crucial to identifying the gaps that need to be filled to prevent and reduce the duration of homelessness spells. These data can also make visible what may otherwise be hidden and understudied aspects of the homelessness problem" (Culhane 2016)

Research aims and objectives

Aim:

To understand the role that the police play in the life of people who have experienced homelessness in a UK local authority

Objectives:

- To explore how administrative data can be used to understand the relationship between homelessness and the police

- To identify early intervention points to prevent homelessness

- To explore the spaces of interaction between homeless service users and the police
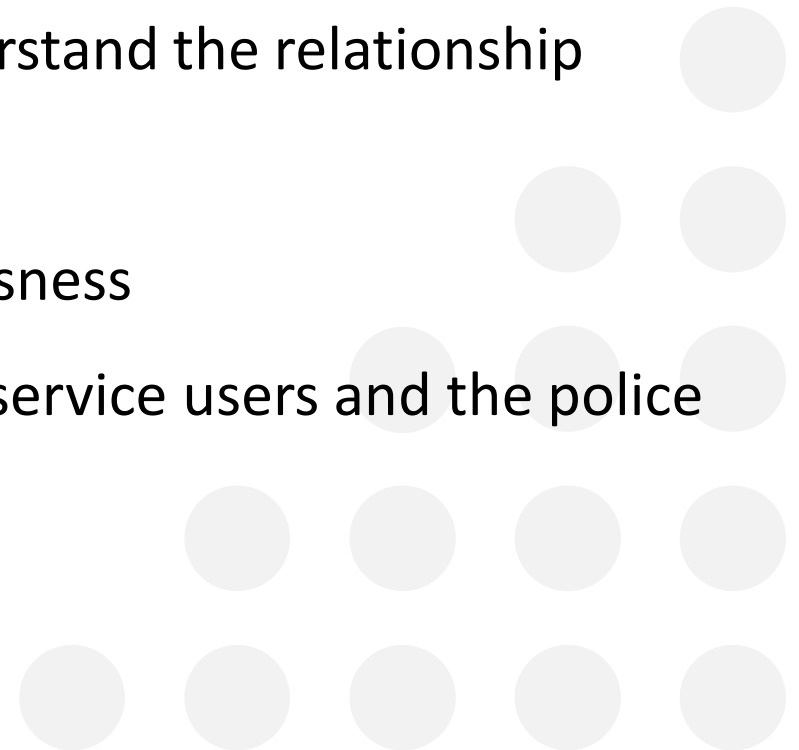
Methodology

- Administrative data - data that is routinely collected by local authority homelessness services and the police
- Linking police and crime data for south Wales and a local authority Housing Options dataset.
- The Housing Options data enables the identification of all homelessness service users in a local authority.
- Within the dataset:
- 7, 322 individuals had experience of making at least one application under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.
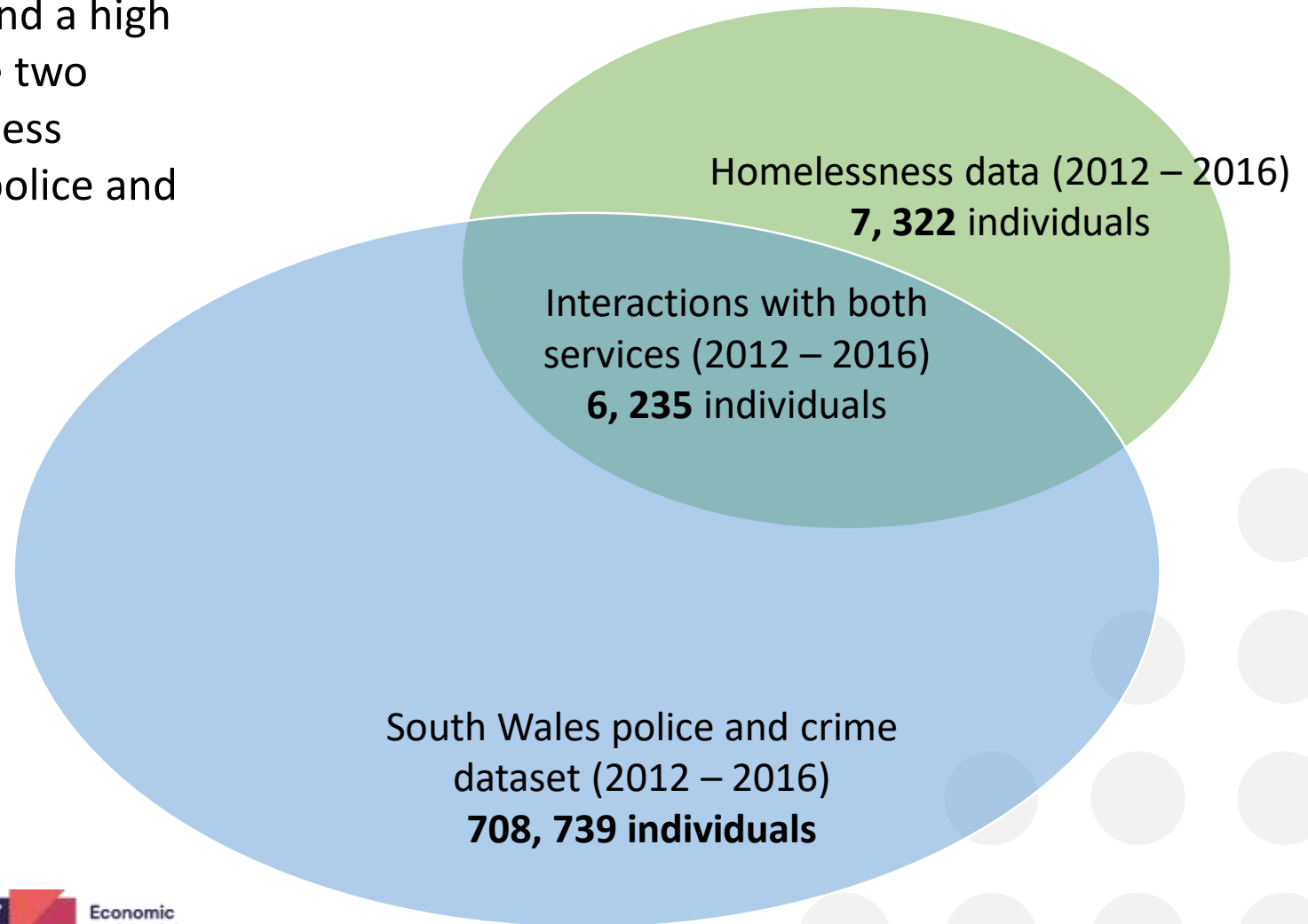- 708, 739 individuals had at least one interaction with the South Wales police force.

Caveats:
- Homelessness in this study is defined as contact with a statutory homelessness service which includes 'advice and support'. This study utilises a very broad definition of homelessness
- The comparison within the police data is not a true control, as the individuals have not been matched, it is instead a comparison between people who have used a homeless service and the 'not homeless'
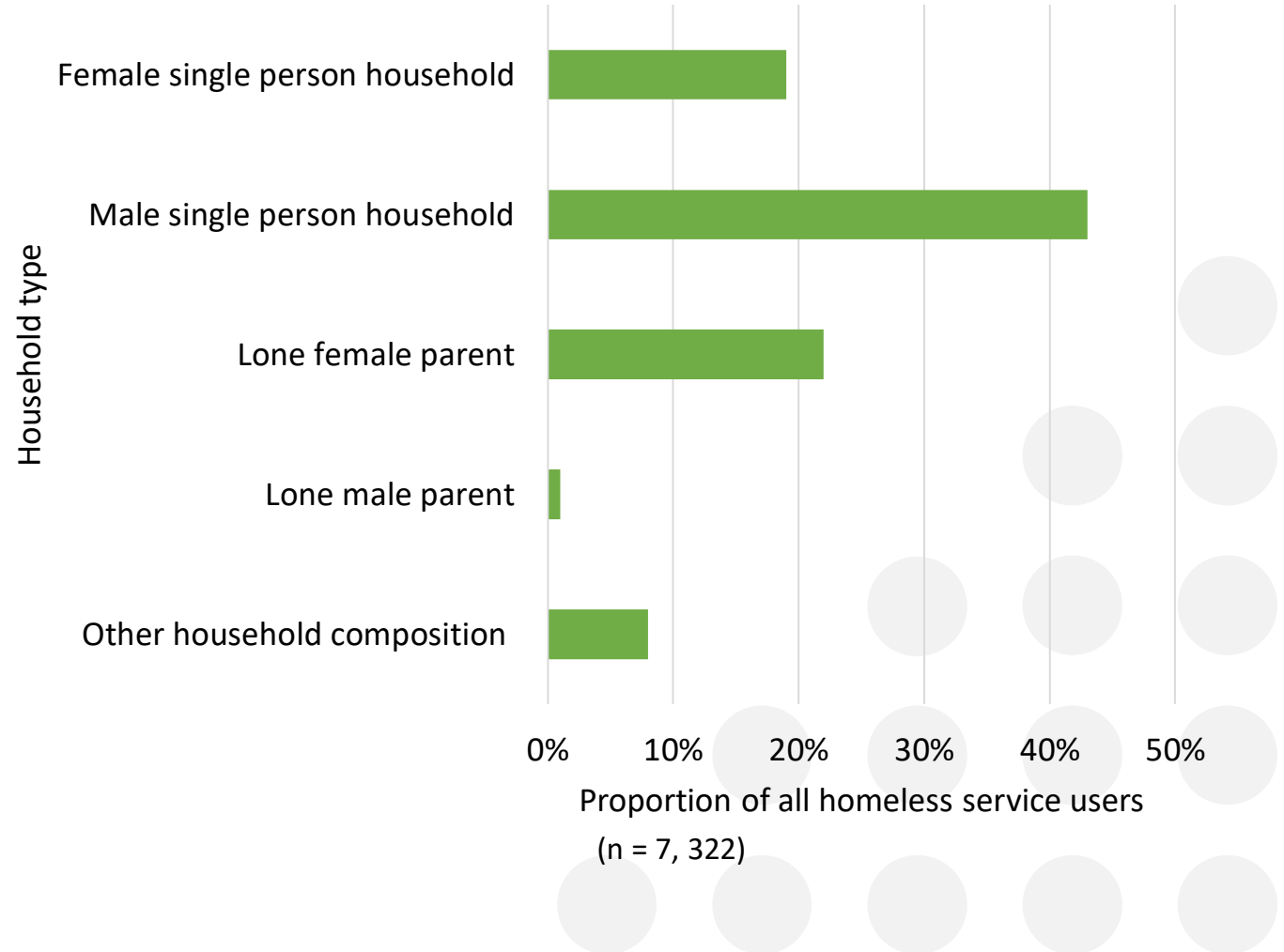- Not all of the interactions with police occurred during a period of homelessness
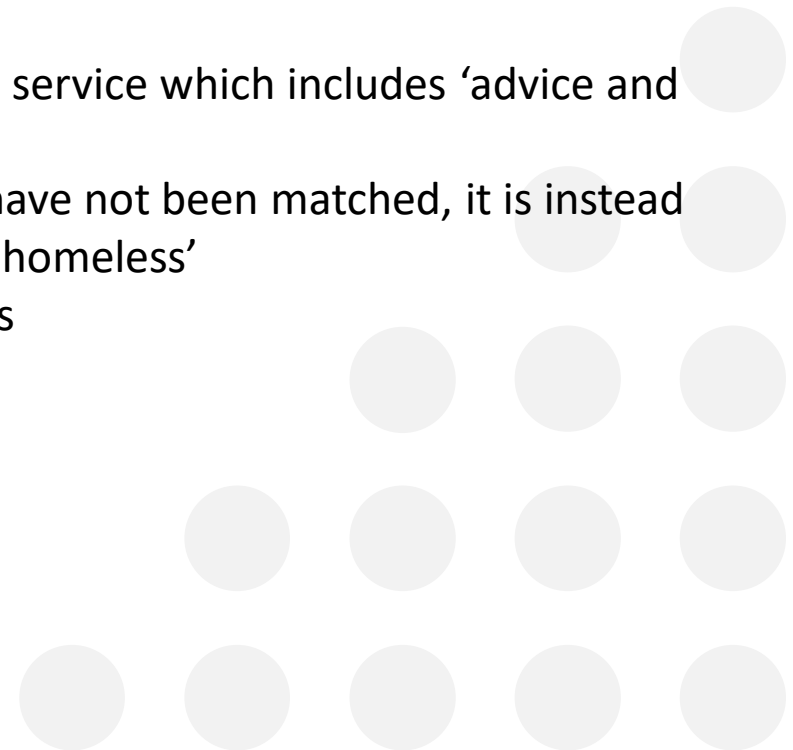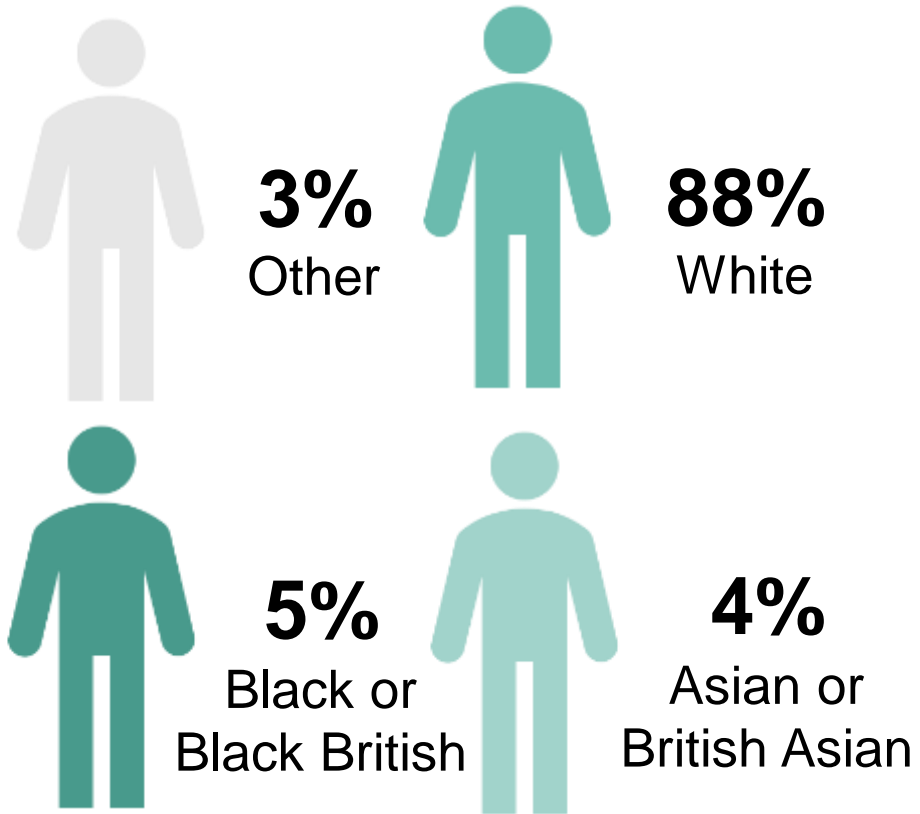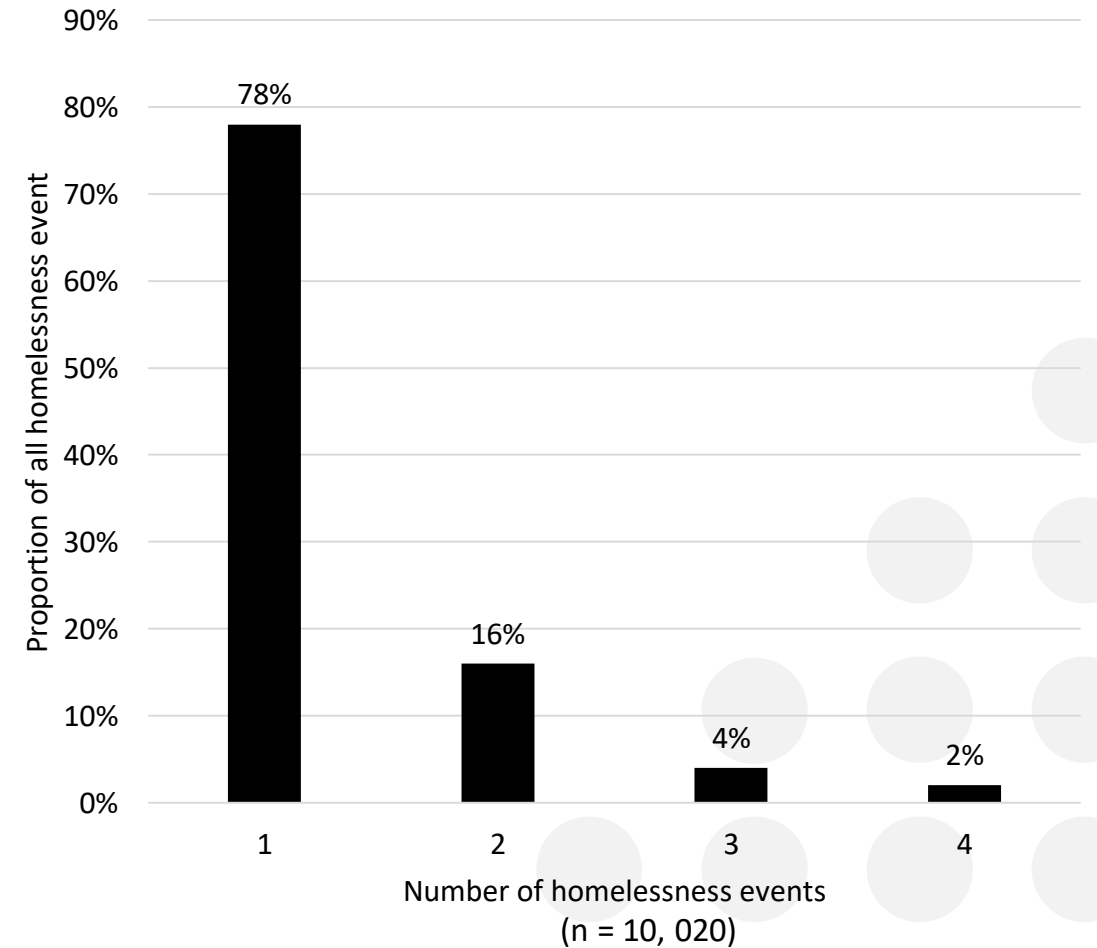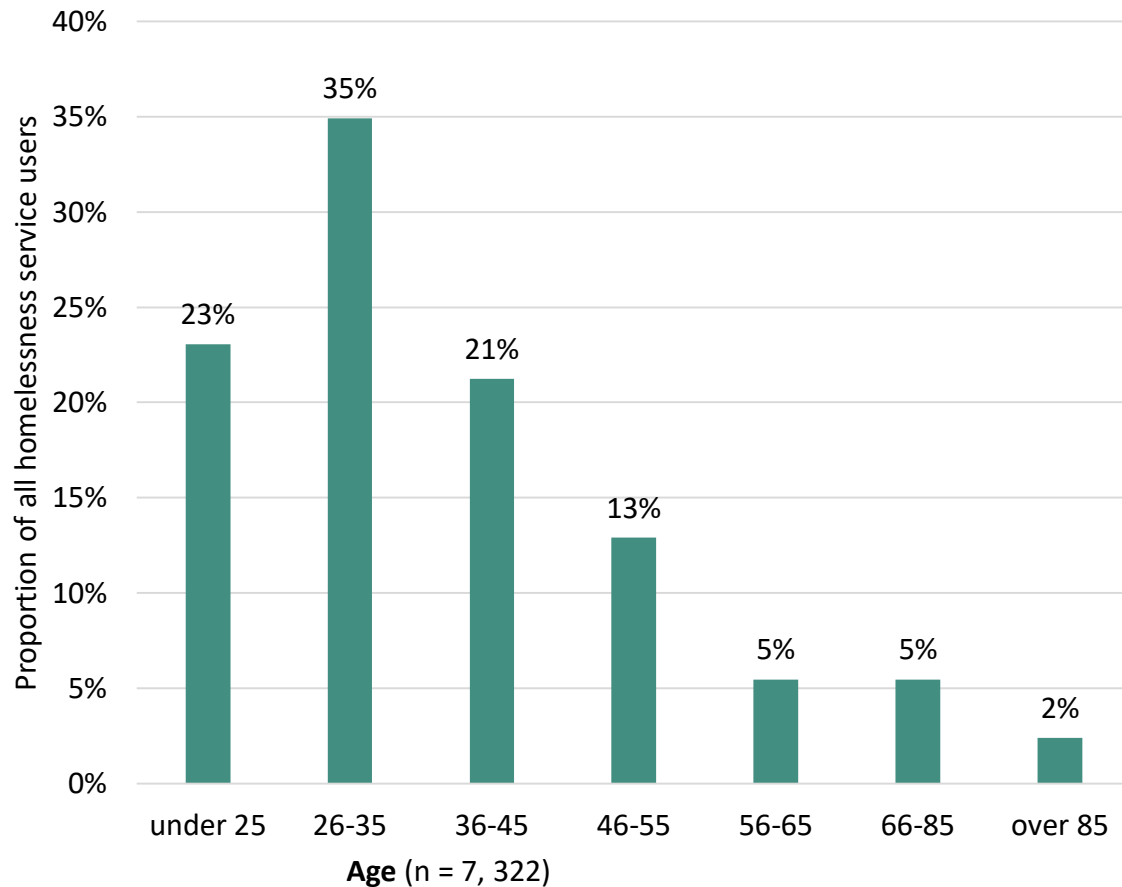
Data linkage

- Linking the two datasets found a high level of overlap between the two services – **80%** of homelessness service users appear in the police and crime dataset.

Homelessness data (2012 – 2016)
7, 322 individuals

Interactions with both services (2012 – 2016)
6, 235 individuals

South Wales police and crime dataset (2012 – 2016)
708, 739 individuals

Composition of a statutory homelessness service

3% Other

88% White

5% Black or Black British

4% Asian or British Asian

Female single person household

Male single person household

Lone female parent

Lone male parent

Other household composition

Household type

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%

Proportion of all homeless service users
(n = 7, 322)

Composition of the statutory homelessness service

Left chart — bar chart: Proportion of all homelessness service users vs Age (n = 7, 322)
- under 25: 23%
- 26-35: 35%
- 36-45: 21%
- 46-55: 13%
- 56-65: 5%
- 66-85: 5%
- over 85: 2%

Right chart — bar chart: Proportion of all homelessness event vs Number of homelessness events (n = 10, 020)
- 1: 78%
- 2: 16%
- 3: 4%
- 4: 2%

Homelessness and police interactions

The homeless population are interacting with the police for different reasons.

Those known to homelessness services are:

- more likely to have an emergency call out
- more likely to be involved in public safety interactions
- slightly more likely to be involved in crime interactions
- less likely to be involved in transport related interactions
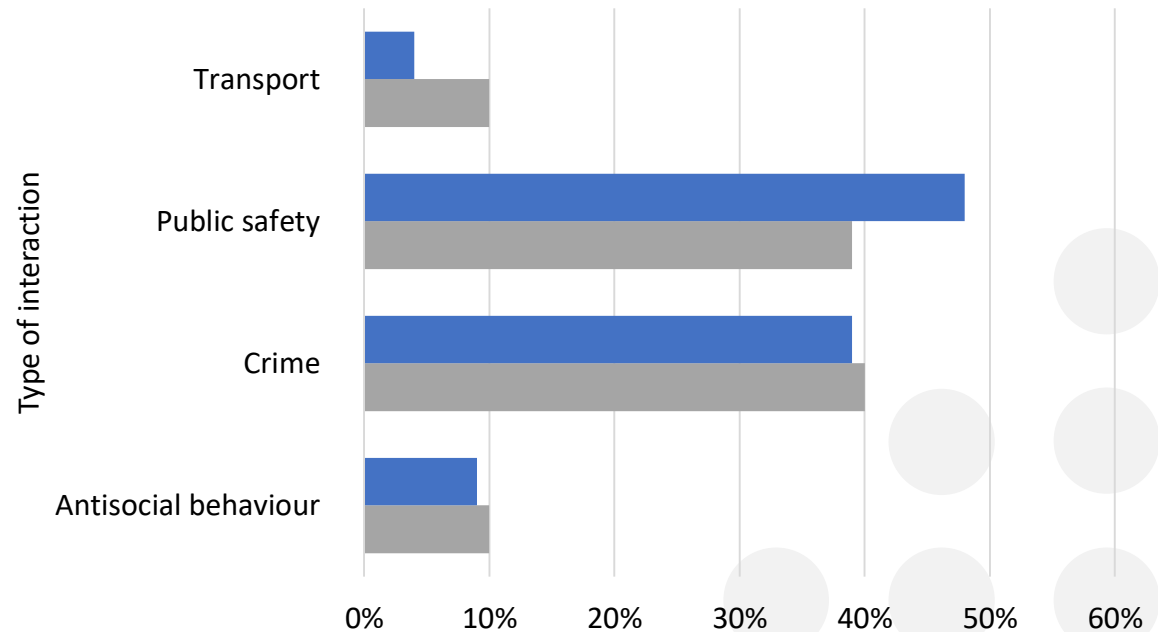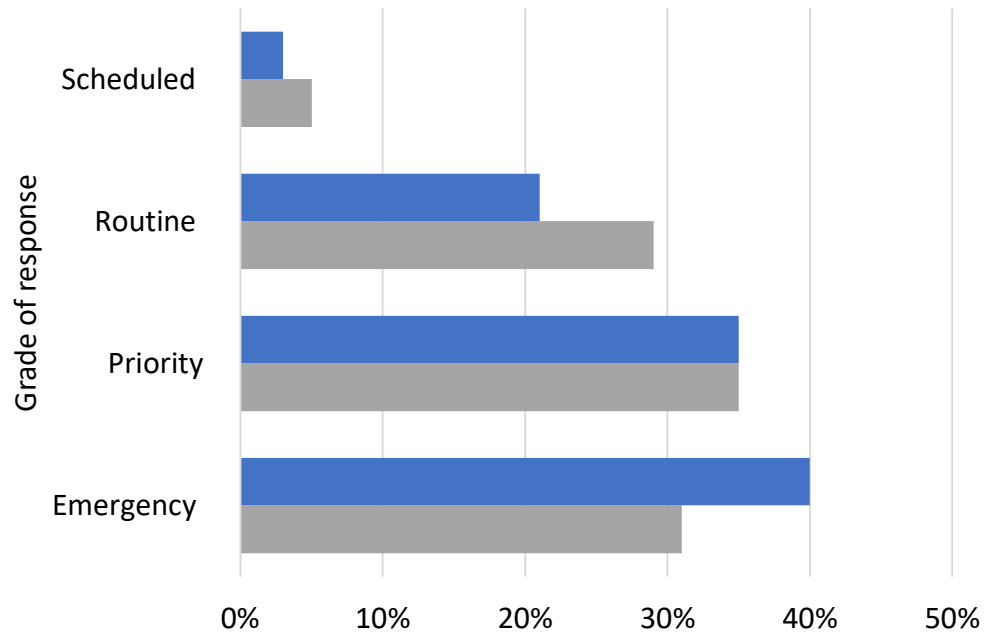
Person who has experienced homelessness (n=83,790)

Person not known to homelessness services (n=2,192,370

Homelessness and police interactions

The National Standard for Incident Reporting (NSIR)

Concern for Safety incident: A report received where there is a genuine and justifiable concern for a person's welfare or well-being and the report does not outline any information which may dictate that the person is missing...this includes fears for personal safety as well as reports that a person has been found either collapsed or appears to be suffering from any illness or injury (including mental illness) ... or those who appear to be drunk and incapable but not disorderly.

Domestic Incident: A report of a domestic incident, which occurs in either a public or private place. This category is designed to capture those incidents where the circumstances do not amount to a notifiable crime.
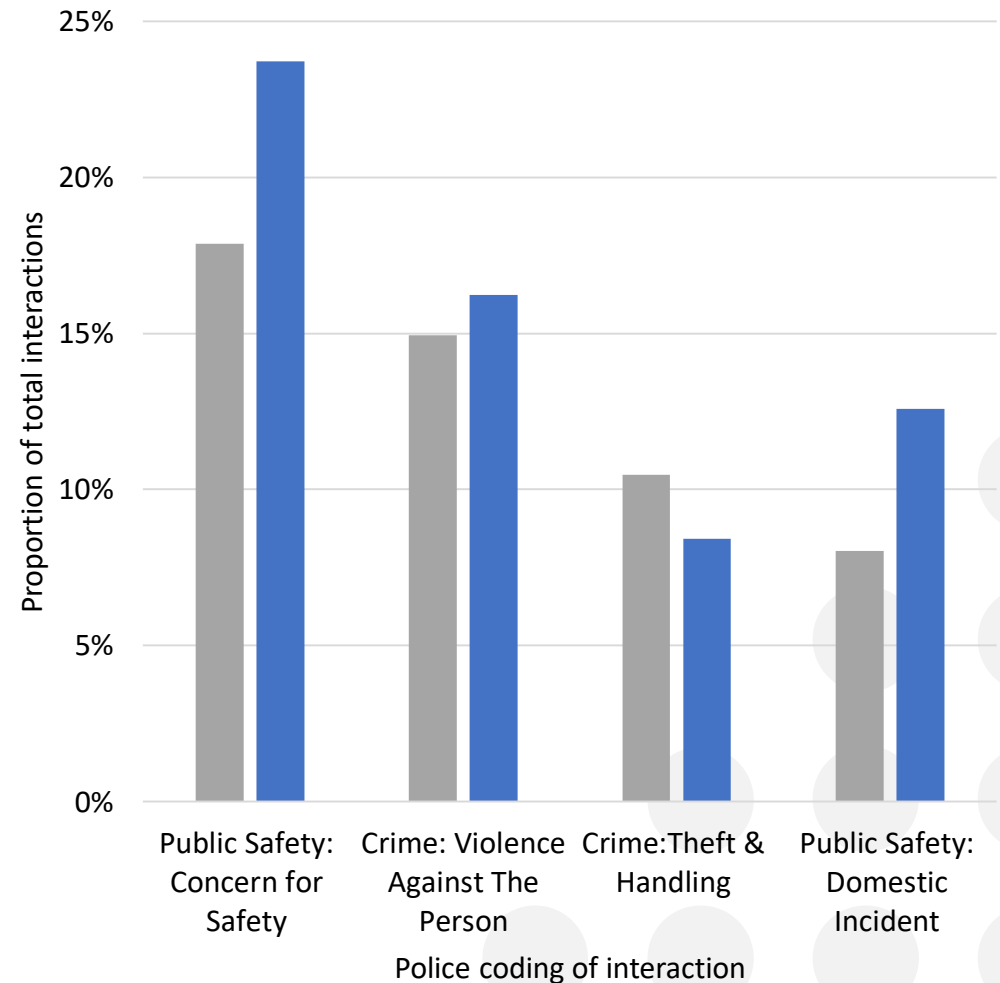
Crime definitions

Theft and handling: Theft from a person, motor vehicle, bikes, residential or non-residential property and more. Plus the storage, transport or attempted resale of property after a theft has occurred.

Violence against the person:
Includes a range of offences from minor offences to serious offences, including:
- Assault with injury
- Common assault
- Harassment
- Murder (homicide)
- Offensive weapon
- Wounding / grievous bodily harm

Chart: Proportion of total interactions (y-axis, 0%–25%) by Police coding of interaction (x-axis)

Categories: Public Safety: Concern for Safety; Crime: Violence Against The Person; Crime: Theft & Handling; Public Safety: Domestic Incident
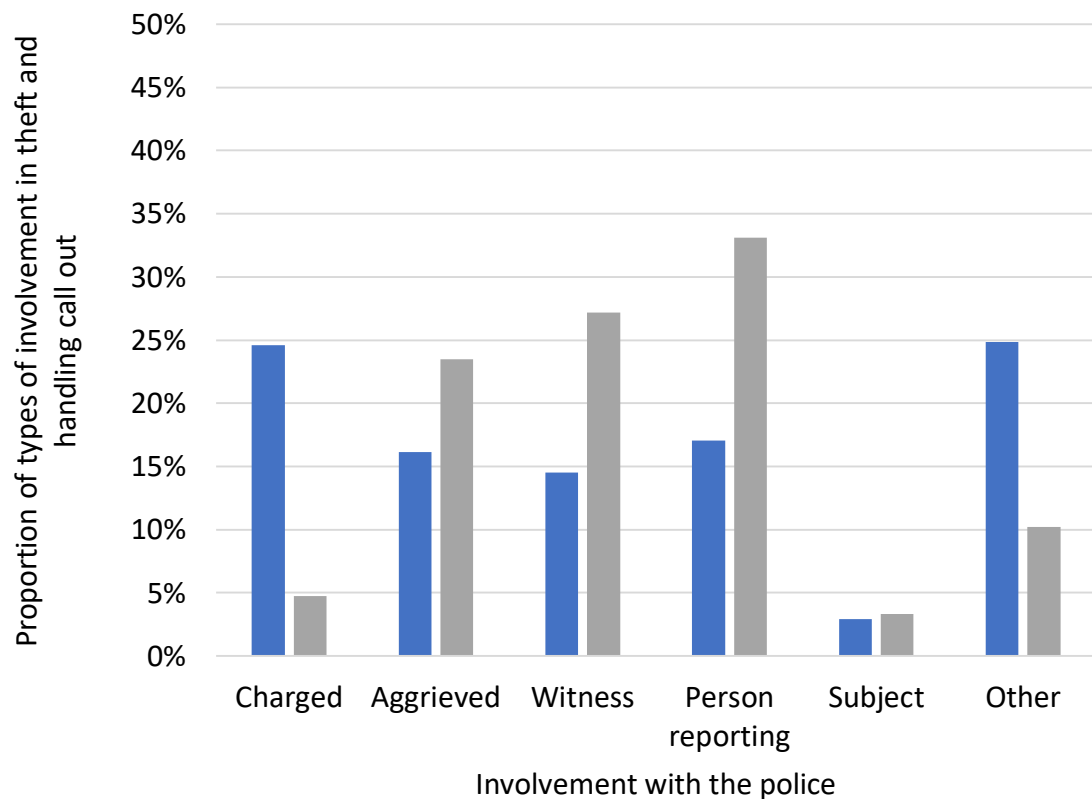
Legend:
- Person who has experienced homelessness (n=83,790)
- Person not known to homelessness services (n=2,192,370)
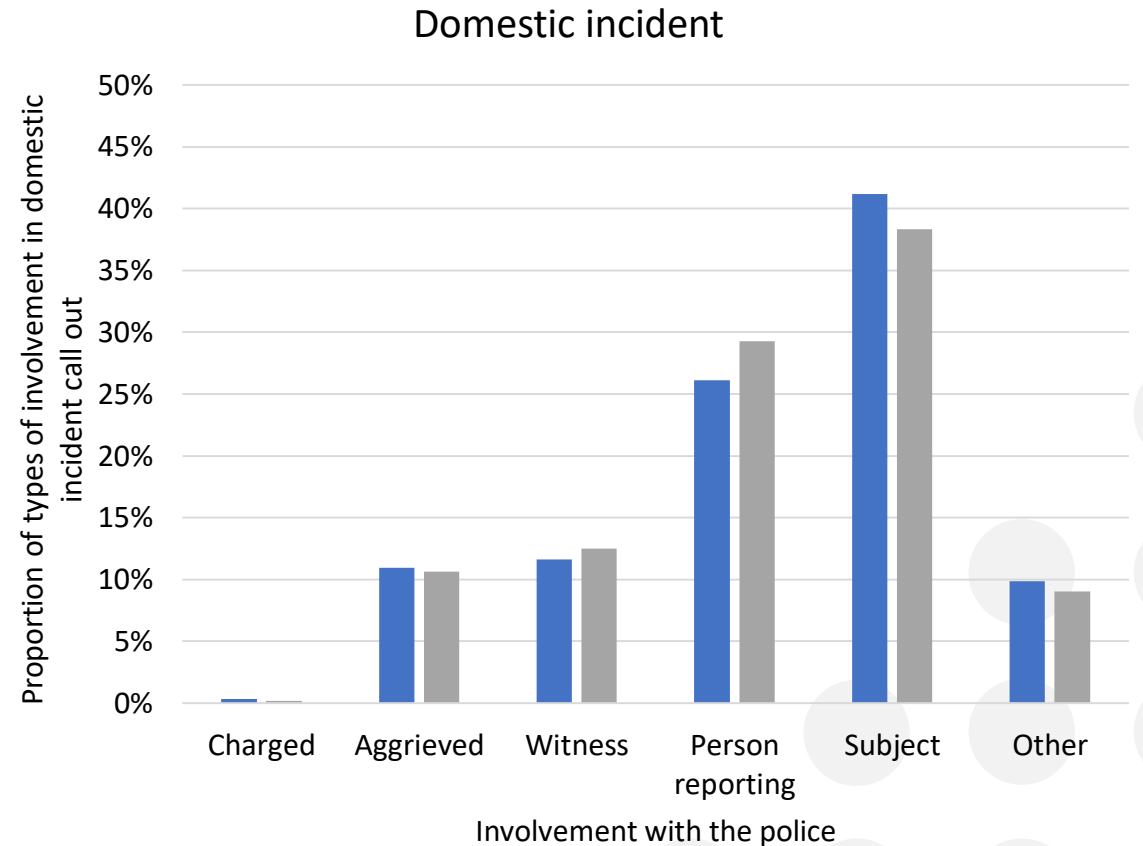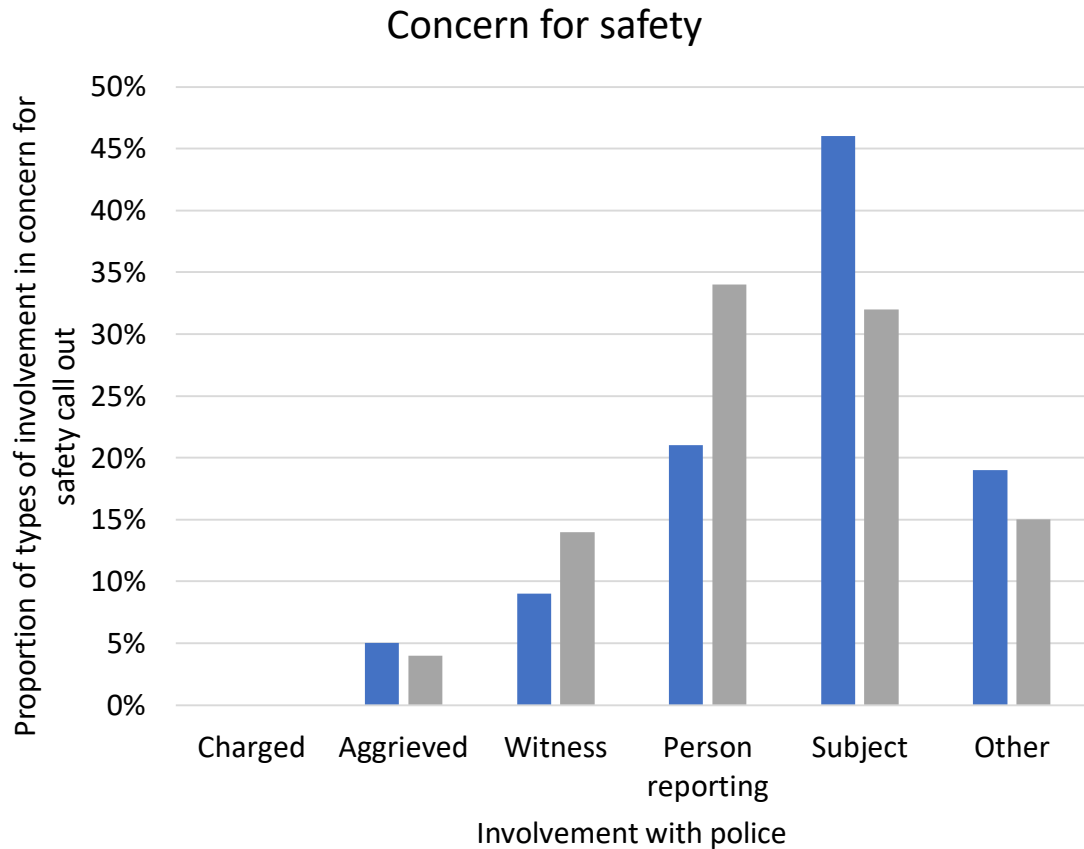
Homelessness and police interactions

Homelessness and police interactions

Theft and handling

Violence against the person
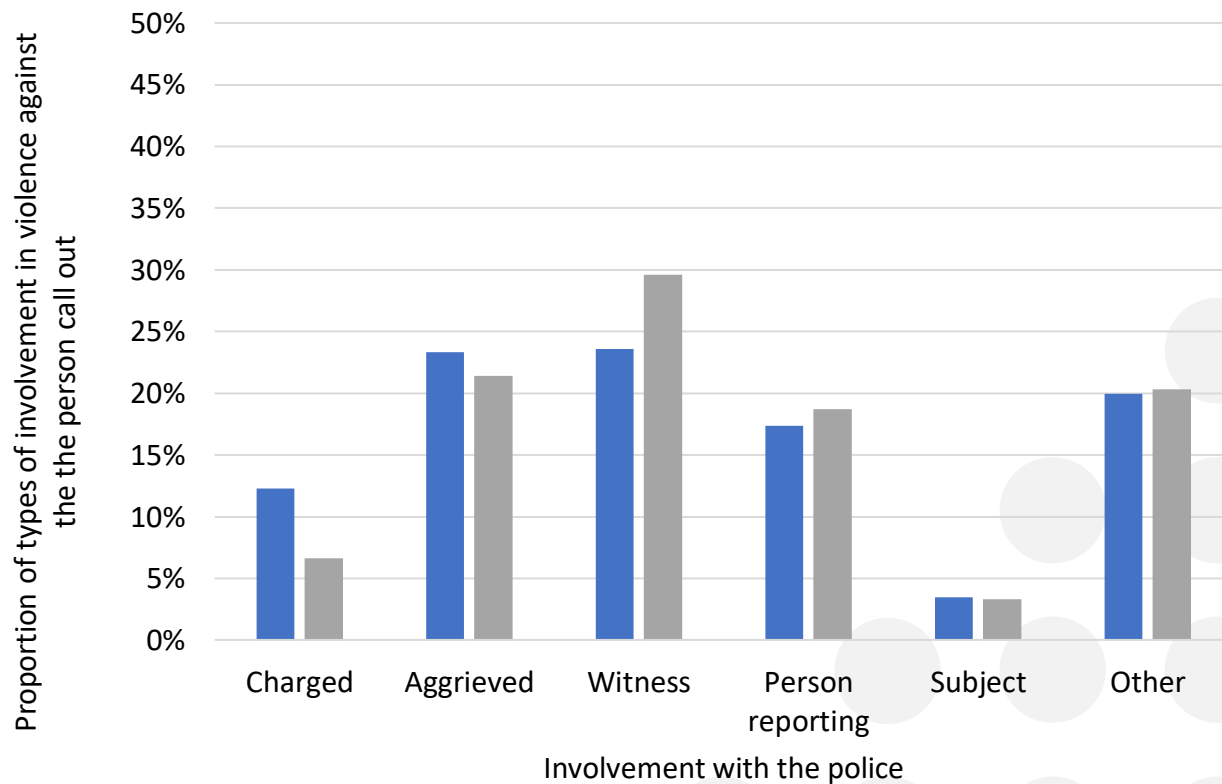
Proportion of types of involvement in theft and handling call out

Proportion of types of involvement in violence against the the person call out

Involvement with the police

Involvement with the police

Charged Aggrieved Witness Person reporting Subject Other

Person who has experienced homelessness (n=83,790)

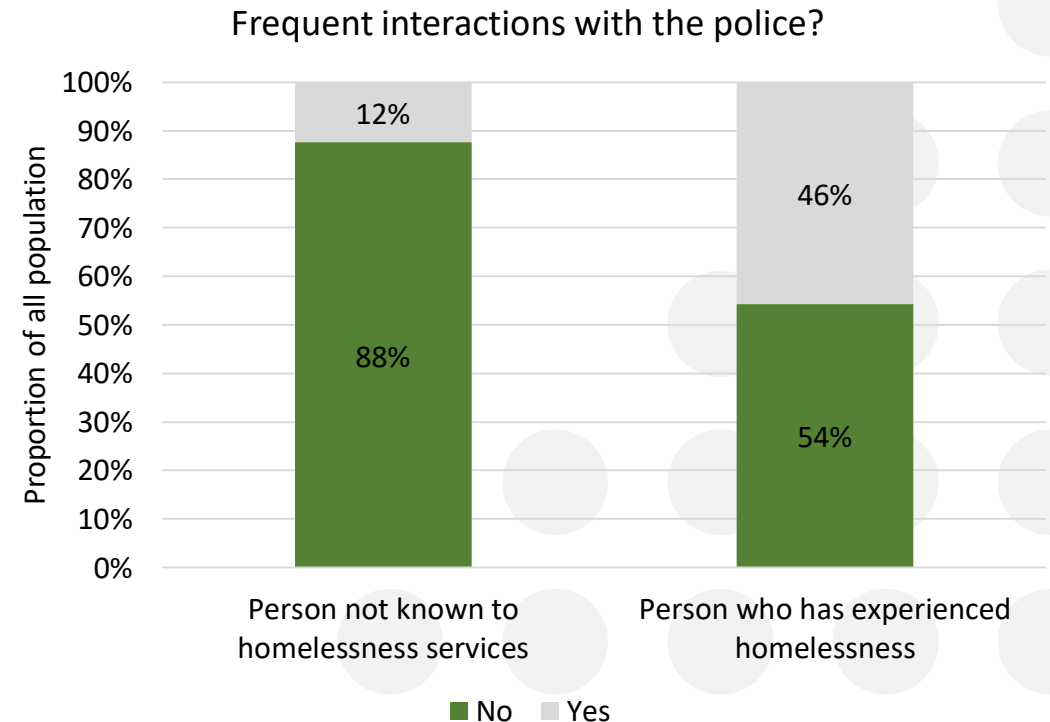Person not known to homelessness services (n=2,192,370

Frequent interactions with the police

**The homeless population is interacting with the police far more often than the average.**

- The average (median) number of interactions with South Wales police over four years for a single LA homeless service user is **6.**
- Whereas, for all other individuals in the South Wales police dataset, the average (median) number of interactions over four years is **2.**
- To determine what 'frequent' interaction with the police would look like, I generated percentiles for each of the study years, the 95th percentile remained stable at 5 interactions per year.
- Frequent interaction should therefore be defined as at least one year where there are five or more interactions.

	Person not known to homelessness services	Person who has experienced homelessness
Mean	3.871	13.7569
Mode	2	6
95th percentile	13	51
Total	572,211	6,128

Frequent interactions with the police?

Proportion of all population

Person not known to homelessness services: No 88%, Yes 12%
Person who has experienced homelessness: No 54%, Yes 46%
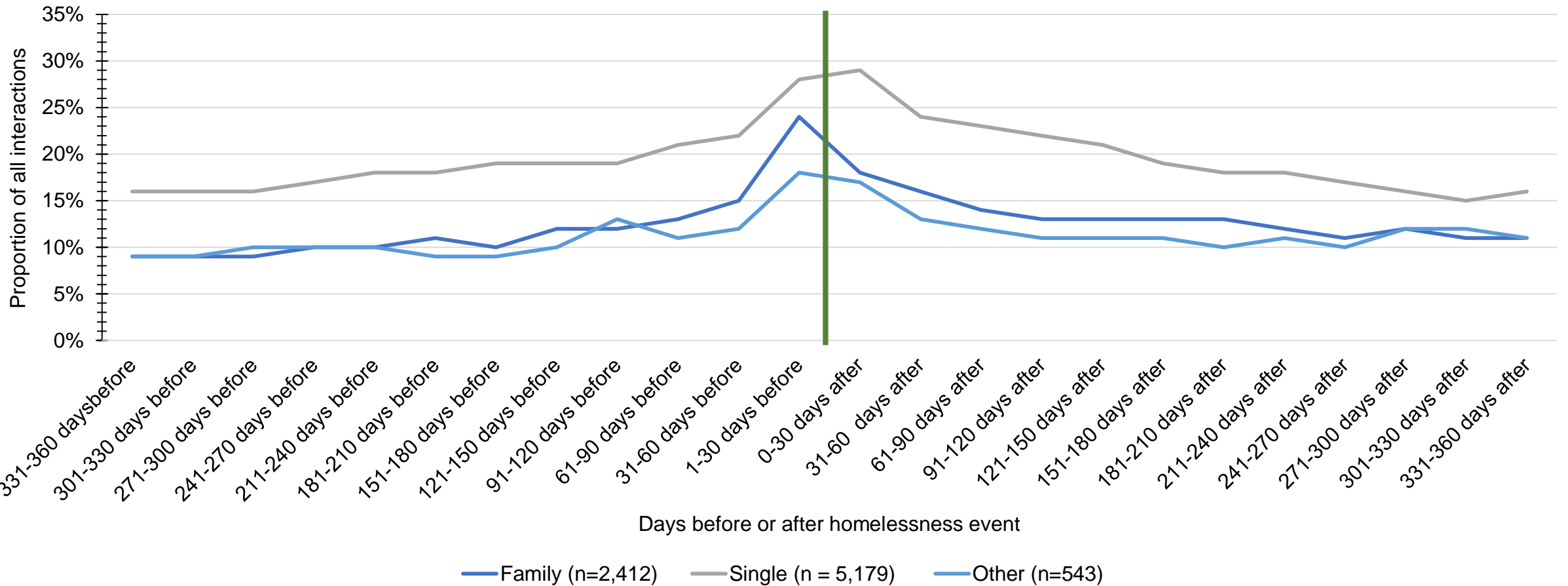
■ No   ■ Yes

Police interactions around homelessness event

Percentage of individuals interacting with the police in each 30 day period
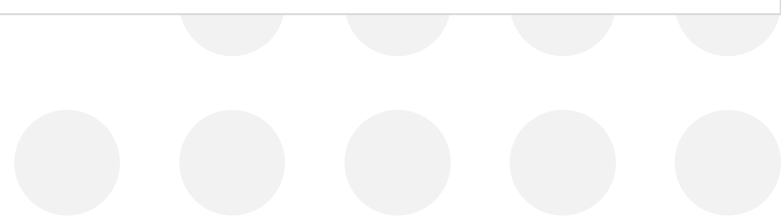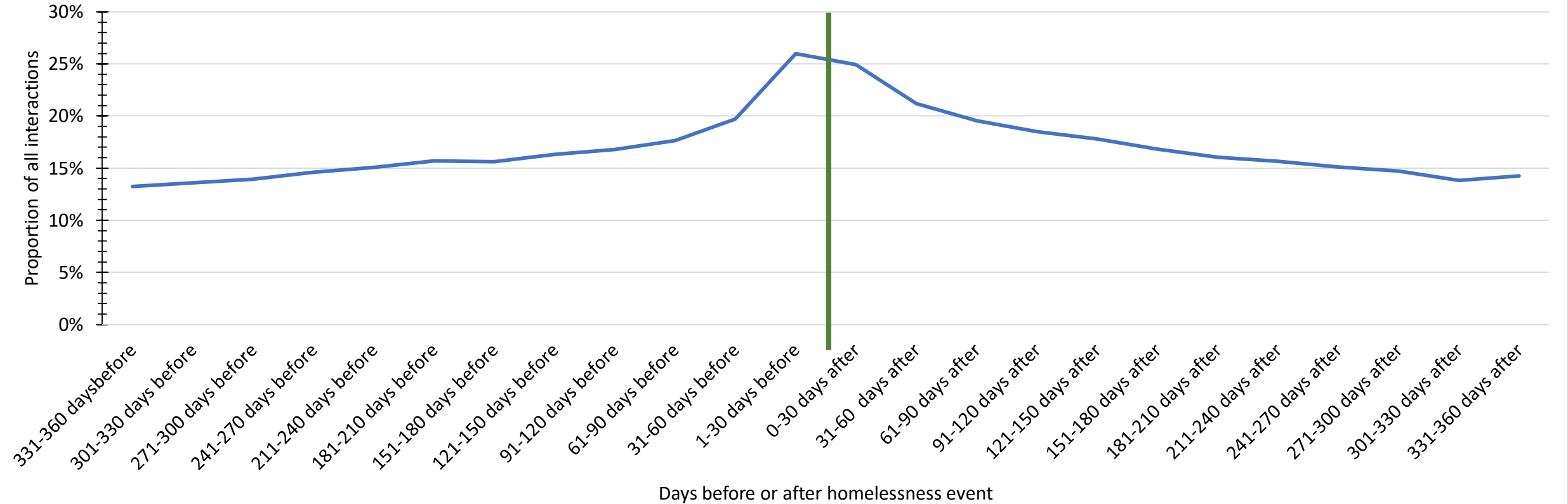
Police interactions around homelessness event

Percentage of individuals interacting with the police in each 30 day period

Conclusions

- This research aimed to understand the role that the police play in the life of people who have experienced homelessness in a UK local authority.
- For some homelessness service users there is a clear relationship, where interactions with the police increase prior to the homelessness event, showing clear early intervention points.
- Homeless service users are more likely to interact with the police than those not known to homelessness services. With some homeless service users interacting the with police over 51 times in four years.
- However a majority of these interactions tend to be for non-crime related reasons.
- In this study, police are most likely to interact with homeless service users when they are the subject of a 'concern for safety' call.
- This research suggests we should reimagine the relationship between homelessness and policing, and consider the ways the police are interacting with homeless people in the private realm.
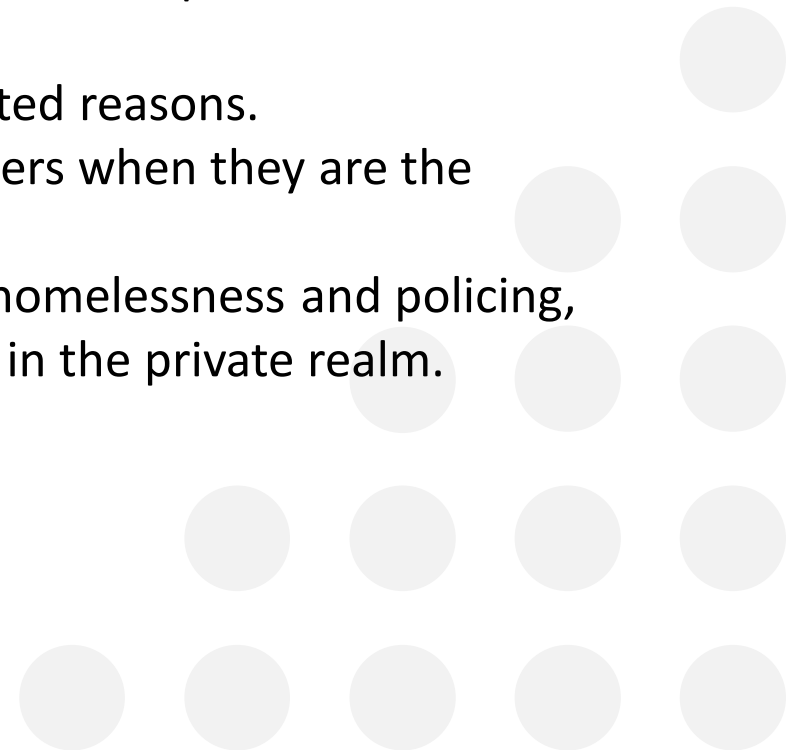
Thank you

Questions?

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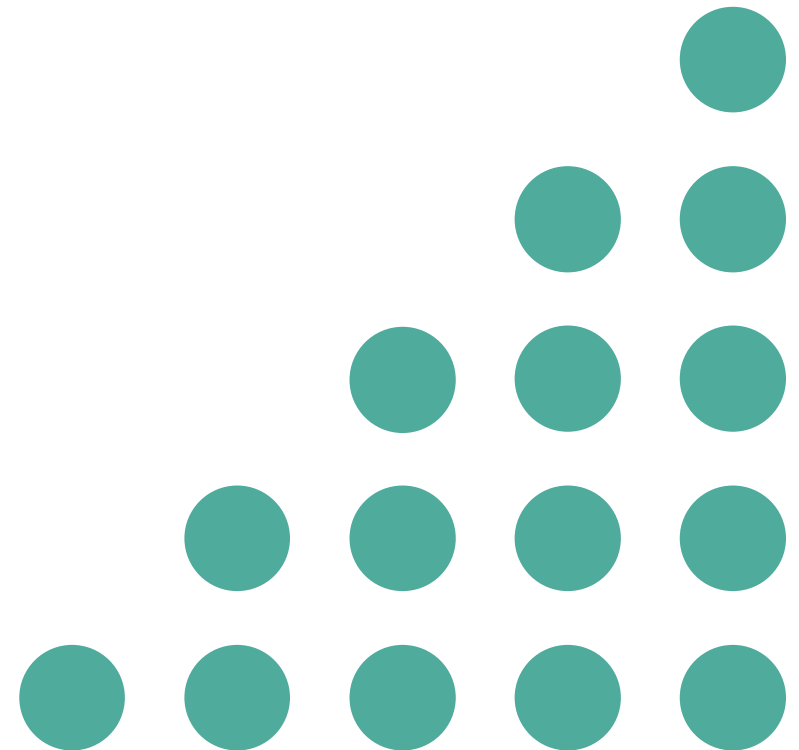
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